

Minutes of the Natural Heritage Advisory Council
JUNE 13, 2012

NATURAL RESOURCES BUILDING
1111 WASHINGTON STREET SE
OLYMPIA, WASHINGTON
ROOM 172
9:40 A.M. – 3:00 P.M.

Voting members present in person: Cherie Kearney

Voting members present on phone: Peter Dunwiddie, Al Black, Wade Troutman, Len Barson, Janelle Downs (joined approx. 10am).

Ex Officio members present in person: Rob Fimbel, Elizabeth Rodrick

Members absent: Bob Meier, John Banks, Steve McLellan, Chris Hempleman, Julie Sackett

DNR Staff: John Gamon, Curt Pavola, Pene Speaks, Dave Wilderman, Heather Kapust, Michele Zukerberg

AGENDA

I. Introductions

The meeting was convened by Chair Kearney at 9:40. Individuals on the phone and those in the meeting room introduced themselves.

II. Review and Approval of Meeting Minutes

January 25, 2012 and April 4, 2012 meetings

Chair Kearney asked for comments and/or corrections to the draft Minutes of the January 25, 2012 and April 4, 2012 meetings of the Natural Heritage Advisory Council (NHAC). None were offered.

A motion to approve the January 25, 2012 and April 4, 2012 minutes of both meetings as presented was made by Len Barson, seconded by Al Black. The motion passed unanimously.

III. Old Business

Progress on past recommendations: Acquisitions Report

Heather Kapust, Special Lands Acquisition staff, reported on acquisition activities since the January 25, 2012 Natural Heritage Advisory Council meeting. A written report was distributed to council prior to the meeting. Five properties have been acquired: four within the approved boundary for Stavis Natural Resources Conservation Area (NRCA) and one within the Woodard Bay NRCA approved boundary.

The four Stavis NRCA properties total approximately 46 acres. There has been some clearing for home sites and construction of some of the infrastructure for development, including powerline work and storm-water runoff detention ponds. Acquisition of these properties will preclude further development. Management of these properties will likely include restoration.

The most recent acquisition was the 50th transaction at the Stavis NRCA. DNR has made impressive progress at this site acquiring many of the undeveloped and developed smaller properties within the boundary, which in the long-term, will save management time and money by reducing inholdings and their edge-effects, and reduces the number of landowners needing complicated access easements.

The property acquired at Woodard Bay NRCA is a little less than 9 acres. The subject property is developed with a small house and several outbuildings, which will be deconstructed using current grant funding and the property will be restored. Acquisition of the property was important to enhance DNR's management of the NRCA by removing incompatible uses and preventing further habitat degradation. Restoration of the property will provide additional continuity of upland forest protection in an area where DNR is currently working towards acquisition of neighboring properties. There was some discussion about the planned removal of the house and what options the program might have with grant funding requirements.

Barson asked about the progress DNR staff are making in terms of spending the currently allotted WWRP acquisition dollars and whether any of the current project contracts would expire. Kapust responded that the Special Lands Acquisition staff are working diligently and are prioritizing their efforts in part based on the contract expiration dates. She also noted that, if necessary, some of the project contracts could be extended.

Budget update:

Natural Heritage Program – status of funding

Speaks provided an update on the status of the Natural Heritage Program's (NHP) funding for the rest of the 2011-2013 biennium. Heading toward the second year of the current biennium, the program was faced with a serious budget challenge. To fund the program at its current level requires about \$700,000 per year. Prior to the legislative session that concluded in May, the program only had \$57,000 in general fund monies. However, the Legislature passed a supplemental budget for the 2011-2013 Biennium, which included \$150,000 in new general fund money for fiscal year 2013 for the NHP. Internally, DNR has made a decision to add \$200,000 in management funds to the program's budget for FY2013. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service also made a commitment to provide \$50,000 for basic operational support. Combined with other federal funding for specific projects (see below), the program is close to reaching the total needed (i.e., \$700,000) to maintain its current level.

Kearney asked whether funding was available to cover the costs of the Natural Heritage Advisory Council. Speaks indicated that there was a statewide prohibition on using general fund monies to provide travel and per diem for volunteer advisory bodies such as the Council. She indicated that it was unknown if that prohibition would continue next biennium.

Gamon gave a brief summary of recent efforts to obtain grant funding. He mentioned two of the larger successes: \$181,000 from EPA for improving the Program's database on wetlands in the state and \$76,000 from USFWS for work on federally listed plant species.

IV. New Business

Trout Lake Natural Area Preserve (NAP) Proposal for Boundary Expansion

Wilderman presented a proposal to expand Trout Lake NAP. The written expansion recommendation was distributed to council members prior to the meeting. The current proposal is to add approximately 170 acres of DNR-managed state trust land to the NAP. The goal of the expansion is to enhance the viability of the existing preserve and to increase the connectivity to upstream habitats. The state trust land is adjacent to the existing NAP and also abuts national forest land to the north. The state trust land is comprised of mixed conifer forest along with two areas of more open oak woodland communities. There is also potential additional rare plant habitat within the oak woodland areas.

Council members discussed the potential for enlarging the expansion to include the adjacent private lands and the importance of local support for the expansion. Wilderman responded to a question about the status of past hunting concerns at the site by indicating that special hunting rules apply to the area. He also indicated that monitoring of the hunting use has not shown impacts to the site. The safety concerns of the neighbors seem to have been adequately addressed. Kearney commented that the Columbia Land Trust has Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program funding for agricultural land conservation within the Trout Lake Valley, which is complementary to the DNR efforts at Trout Lake NAP.

Len Barson made a motion to approve the proposal to expand the boundary, as presented. Wade Troutman seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Kennedy Creek NAP: Preliminary Proposal for Boundary Expansion

Zukerberg gave an overview of a potential for a boundary expansion at the Kennedy Creek NAP. Three salt marsh ecosystem types are the primary features at this site. An earlier expansion (ca. 2004) added a parcel along Schneider Creek. The expansion being considered would include more of the creek to the east and adjacent to that parcel. One of the properties under consideration includes an older house, which would need to be removed, and a riparian area that is in need of restoration work. Capitol Land Trust has been active upstream along Schneider Creek, which also adds to the protection of the creek and benefits the NAP. The field trip today will not include the actual parcels being considered for inclusion in the boundary due to concerns about disturbing the occupants of the house on the property.

Speaks referenced a potential change in how the programs bring proposals forward to the Commissioner of Public Lands for approval indicating that he may want to be involved earlier in the process. She indicated that staff would have more information at the October meeting.

V. Agency Reports – brief updates Recreation and Conservation Office

The RCO representative was not present so no report was submitted. Speaks mentioned that Scott Robinson, formerly with DNR, is now the new Deputy Director for RCO.

Department of Ecology – No report

State Parks and Recreation Commission

Fimbel commented that State Parks is still evolving in response to budget cuts and is in the process of identifying options for being self-supporting.

Department of Fish and Wildlife

Rodrick gave a brief overview of DFW's list of WWRP grant proposals in the Critical Habitat category: Okanogan Similkameen, Mountain View, Rock Creek (Klickitat County), Heart of the Cascades, Rattlesnake Mountain (south of Hanford), and Mid-Columbia Shrub Steppe (Douglas County). She also indicated that DFW has one project – Merrill Lake - in the Natural Areas category.

Department of Natural Resources

Speaks mentioned that DNR is in the process of developing a long-term Marbled Murrelet strategy. The department recently completed a minor amendment to its habitat conservation plan as part of the process of developing the strategy. The amendment is the subject of legal challenge.

VI. Natural Areas Program Report

Pavola gave an oral summary in addition to his written report (distributed to council members prior to the meeting). In addition to the pending Trout Lake expansion for the Trust Land Transfer Parcel, DNR will be holding a public hearing in July in Pierce County for transfer of an 80-acre Common School Trust parcel into NRCA status. Known as Ashford 80, this parcel is surrounded by lands primarily managed for conservation, by the county and Nisqually Land Trust. A program similar to Trust Land Transfer was created by the Legislature to compensate several small counties with a high level of trust lands encumbered, and thus not harvestable, due to habitat for marbled murrelet and spotted owl. DNR held a hearing in Wahkiakum County for the first transfer, of 67 acres, and similar small transfer are planned in Pacific and Skamania Counties this biennium. The expectation is that these encumbered county trust lands will be transferred over many biennia, providing revenue to the

counties and funding the replacement of encumbered assets. The council asked to see maps of the proposed NRCAs which staff will send via email.

The Columbia Hills boundary expansion is in process, following the public hearing. Kennedy Creek will be brought to the council this fall, after our field trip discussion later today. The Mima Mounds boundary expansion has been signed by the commissioner, as has Trombetta Canyon. A public hearing on the expansion recommendation for Upper Dry Gulch is being postponed for additional internal review. The Wanapum proposed-NAP is moving forward after a very positive and supportive meeting in Grant County with the Bureau of Reclamation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Next up at Wanapum will be outreach to the water districts and PUD.

VII. Natural Heritage Program

John Gamon indicated that he will provide a written program report. He did report that the Program received an award from NatureServe for Outstanding Scientific and Technical Achievement. Washington Natural Heritage Program was one of three award recipients at the annual NatureServe conference, Biodiversity Without Boundaries, joining the Florida Natural Areas Inventory and the Ecuador Conservation Data Center. Washington was cited for its partnership with RareCare at the University of Washington, the development of the *Field Guide to the Rare Plants of Washington* (a partnership with BLM, UW, Washington Native Plant Society, and the US Forest Service), and the development and application of Ecological Integrity Assessments as a tool to measure ecological condition of sites. The latter has involved partnerships with State Parks and the Department of Fish and Wildlife.

VIII. Other Business

Speaks reminded everyone that there are vacancies on the Council and there are a number of positions that expire in the near future. She suggested that a committee of Council members be formed to recruit candidates and to poll current members regarding being re-appointed. Janelle Downs, Cherie Kearney and Peter Dunwiddie volunteered.

IX. Adjourn for field trip to Kennedy Creek NAP

The meeting was adjourned at 11:55 A.M. Council members Kearney and Fimbel joined staff on a field trip to Kennedy Creek NAP.